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STATUS OF PREPARATION OF PUBLICATIONS, STUDIES AND DOCUMENTS FOR THE WORLD CONFERENCE

Addendum

Contribution from the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East

1. The United Nations Relief Works Agency (UNRWA) was established by General Assembly resolution 302 of 8 December 1949 as a temporary organization to provide assistance to approximately 750,000 Palestinians who became refugees following the Arab-Israeli hostilities of 1948. After more than 40 years, the Palestine refugee question remains unresolved and today UNRWA provides assistance to more than 2.7 million registered refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, Syrian Arab Republic and the occupied territory of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, as well as thousands of needy displaced Palestinians, mainly in Jordan.

2. While UNRWA's mandate is flexible and its work is of a humanitarian nature, the Agency's primary function lies in the provision of education, health and relief and social services rather than in the domain of human rights. UNRWA is accordingly not in a position to comment directly on the various themes relating to standards, implementation and technical assistance. However, a brief summary of UNRWA's present activities is enclosed for the information of the World Conference.

Present UNRWA Activities

Education

3. UNRWA's education programmes provides general education at the elementary and preparatory levels, as well as teacher and vocational and technical

training for Palestine refugees, in accordance with their education needs, identity and cultural heritage; the programme operates with technical assistance from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). In the 1991-92 scholastic year, 374,000 pupils were enrolled in 636 Agency schools and vocational and teacher training was provided to more than 5,200 students in eight training centres. Education was seriously disrupted during the various rounds of fighting of the Lebanese civil war. In the occupied territory, schools and training centres have been subjected to prolonged periods of closure by military order in the period since the outbreak of the intifadah in December 1987. They are presently open but continue to be disrupted by strikes, curfews, disturbances and individual closure orders imposed by the Israeli authorities.

Health

4. The UNRWA health programme comprises curative and preventive care services, environmental health services in camps and distribution of food supplements to vulnerable groups; the programme operates with technical assistance from the World Health Organization (WHO). The continuation of the intifadah and the countermeasures employed by the Israeli authorities have affected UNRWA health services in the occupied territory. The Agency has had to give priority to emergency and casualty care provided in the camps, while at the same time maintaining its regular health activities in all areas in spite of interruptions caused by curfews, strikes, disturbances and the declaration of certain areas as closed military zones. Besides continuing these services, UNWRA's health programme focused upon the implementation of a number of new strategies, including prophylaxis and treatment of nutritional anaemia, management of growth retardation in children, control of diabetes melitus, improved maternal health, development of human resources for health, provision of equipment to and improvement of blood transfusion facilities in non-governmental organization hospitals, and the initiation of a project for building, equipping and commissioning a 232-bed hospital in Gaza at a cost of $35 million, $20 million of which represents capital costs and $15 million operating costs for the first three years.

Relief and social services

5. The relief and social services programme provides support to the neediest among the Palestine refugees - "special hardship cases" - and facilitates self-reliance; the programme consists of assistance to special hardship cases, social case work, income generation and related skill training, women's programmes, rehabilitation of the disabled and assistance to refugees in emergency situations. In view of the deterioration of the socio-economic situation in UNWRA's area of operations, the number of special hardship cases has increased Agency-wide in recent years. In addition, the Agency is placing increasing emphasis upon its income generation and job creation activities. In the occupied territory, projects have been developed aimed at the vocational rehabilitation of disabled, in particular, former bread-winners injured during the intifadah.

Extraordinary measures in Lebanon and the occupied territory

6. In response to the additional needs created by the intifadah and the Israeli response, UNRWA introduced a programme of extraordinary measures which began in early 1988, and has continued since then. The large number of casualties resulting from the intifadah has led to a considerable expansion of the emergency medical programme, with most Agency clinics now remaining open for extended hours. Additional medical supplies and equipment, including health buses for the evacuation of casualties, have been purchased, and the payment of hospital costs and subsidies has been increased. In addition, medical specialists (including orthopaedic surgeons) have been provided and a physiotherapy programme is being run in clinics in both West Bank and Gaza. Welfare services have been expanded to assist the families of those killed, disabled or detained and to cope with the far-reaching socio-economic effects of the intifadah. Additional food is being provided to needy people in both West Bank and Gaza, and needy families have received cash grants. Distribution of food was particularly important during the prolonged curfews imposed by the Israeli authorities during the Persian Gulf War. Finally, the Agency's extraordinary measures in the occupied territory include a programme of general assistance and protection. The major component of this programme is the placing of additional international staff members in the West Bank and Gaza as Refugee Affairs Officers who facilitate Agency operations in the difficult prevailing circumstances and assist the refugee population in their day-to-day life by helping by their presence to lower tensions, especially during confrontations with security forces, and to prevent maltreatment of the refugees, especially vulnerable groups such as women and children.

7. UNRWA's emergency programmes in Lebanon continue to assist those Palestinians most affected by the violence and socio-economic instability. Additional health services, primarily increases in hospitalization subsidies, have been provided and cash assistance has been given to displaced refugees. Food has also been distributed to needy families. For a number of years, UNRWA's emergency services in Lebanon have been provided not only to registered refugees but to all needy Palestinians as well as to needy Lebanese living in proximity to poor Palestinians.

Expanded programme of assistance

8. In 1988, UNRWA launched an expanded programme of assistance to improve living conditions in the occupied territory. The target working figure of $65 million was set for a period of three years, of which approximately $30 million was still required as of November 1992. The high priority in the expanded programme of assistance is to ensure that refugees living in the 27 camps of the West Bank and Gaza Strip have decent shelter, a sanitary environment and easier access to better health care. In recent times, however, the expanded programme of assistance has been expanded to cover certain UNRWA activities outside the occupied territory.